

A Captain In the Ranks

By...
**GEORGE
CARY
EGGLESTON**

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(Continued from last week)

CHAPTER V.

IT was a little after sunset on May 30, 1865, when young Duncan went ashore from the towboat at Cairo. The town was ablaze with fireworks, for a local celebration of the close of the war was in progress as he made his way up the slope of the levee through a narrow passageway that ran between two mountainous piles of cotton bales. At other points there were equally great piles of corn and oats in sacks, pork in barrels, hams and bacon in boxes and finer goods of every kind in bales and packing cases, for Cairo was just at that time the busiest entrepot in all the Mississippi valley.

The town was small, but its business was larger than that of many great cities. The little city lay at the point where the Ohio river runs into the Mississippi. From up and down the Mississippi, from the Ohio, from the Tennessee and the Cumberland and even from far up the Missouri great fleets of steamboats were landing at Cairo every day to load and unload cargoes representing a wealth as great as that of the Indies. A double headed railroad from the north carrying the produce of half a dozen states and connecting by other roads with all the great cities of the land made its terminus at Cairo. Two railroads from the south—traversing five states—ended their lines at Columbus, a little farther down the river, and were connected with the northern lines by steamboats from Cairo.

Cairo was the meeting place of commerce between the north and the south. Out of the upper rivers came light draft steamers. Plying the river below were steamers of far different construction by reason of the easier conditions of navigation. At Cairo every steamboat, whether from north or south, unloaded its freight for reshipment up or down the river, as the case might be, upon steamboats of a different type or by rail. And all the freight brought north or south by rail must also be transferred at Cairo, either to river steamers or to railroad cars.

The south was still thronged with northern troops, numbering hundreds of thousands, who must be fed and clothed and otherwise supplied, and so the government's own traffic through the town was in itself a trade of vast proportions. But that was the smallest part of the matter. Now that the war was at an end the south was setting to work to rebuild itself. From the Cumberland and the Tennessee rivers, from the lower Mississippi, from the Arkansas, the Yazoo, the Red river, the White, the St. Francis and all the rest of the waterways of the south energetic men of broken fortune were hurrying to market all the cotton that they had managed to grow and to save during the war, in order that they might get money with which to buy the supplies needed for the cultivation of new crops.

Pretty nearly all this cotton came to Cairo, either for sale to eager buyers there or for shipment to the east and a market.

In return the planters and the southern merchants through whom they did business were clamorous for such goods as they needed. Grain, hay, pork, bacon, agricultural implements, seed potatoes, lime, plaster, lumber and everything else necessary to the rebuilding of southern homes and industries was pouring into Cairo and out again by train loads and steamboat cargoes night and day.

As Guilford Duncan emerged from the alleyway between the cotton bales and reached the street at top of the levee a still burning fragment of the fireworks fell upon a bale of which the bagging was badly torn, exposing the lint cotton in a way very tempting to fire. With the instinct of the soldier he instantly climbed to the top of the pile, tore away the burning bunches of lint cotton and threw them to the ground, thus preventing further harm.

As he climbed down again a man confronted him.

"Are you a watchman?" asked the man.

"No; I'm only a man in search of work."

"Why did you do that, then?" queried the stranger, pointing to the still burning cotton scattered on the ground.

"On general principles, I suppose," answered Duncan. "There would have been a terrible fire if I hadn't."

"What's your name?"

"Guilford Duncan."

"Want work?"

"Yes."

"What sort?"

"Any sort—for good wages." That last phrase was the result of his stoker experience.

"Well, do you want to watch this cotton tonight and see that no harm comes to it, either from fire or—what's worse—the cotton thieves that go down the alleys, pulling out all the lint they can from the torn bales?"

"Yes, if I can have fair wages."

"Will \$3 for the night be fair wages?"

"Yes—ample. How far does your freight extend up and down the levee?"

"It's pretty nearly all mine, but I have other watchmen on other parts of it. This is a new cargo. Your beat will extend"—And he gave the young man his boundaries.

"You'll be off duty at sunrise. Come to me at 7 o'clock for your pay. I'm Captain Will Hallam. Anybody in Cairo will tell you where my office is. Good night."

The night passed without event of consequence. There were two or three little fires born of the holiday celebration, but Guilford Duncan managed to suppress them without difficulty. Later in the night the swarm of cotton thieves, mainly boys and girls, invaded the levee, with bags conveniently slung over their shoulders. As there were practically no policemen in the town and as his beat was a large one, young Duncan for a time had difficulty in dealing with these marauders. But after he had arrested half a dozen of them only to find that there were no



"Why did you do that, then?" police officers to whom he could turn them over he adopted a new plan. He secured a heavy stick from a bale of hay, and with that he clubbed every cotton thief he could catch. As a soldier it was his habit to adapt means to ends, so he bit hard at heads and seized upon all the stolen goods. Thus passed Guilford Duncan's first night as a common soldier in the great army of industry.

In the morning at the hour appointed he presented himself to Captain Will Hallam and was taken into that person's private office for an interview.

CHAPTER VI.

CAPTAIN WILL HALLAM was a man of the very shrewdest sense, fairly though not liberally educated, whose life from boyhood onward had been devoted to the task of taking quick advantage of every opportunity that the great river traffic of the fifties had offered to men of enterprise and sound judgment.

Beginning as a barefoot boy about 1850 or earlier—he never mentioned the date—he had "run the river" in all sorts of capacities until when the war came, temporarily paralyzing the river trade, he had a comfortable little sum of money to the good.

Unable to foresee what the course and outcome of the war might be, he determined as a measure of prudence to indulge himself and his little hoard in a period of safe waiting. He converted all his possessions into gold and deposited the whole of it in a Canadian bank, where, while it earned no interest, it was at any rate perfectly safe.

Then he sought and secured a clerkship in the commissary department of the army, living upon the scant salary that the clerkship afforded and meanwhile acquainting himself in minute detail with the food resources of every quarter of the country, the means and methods of transportation and handling and everything else that could in any wise aid him in making himself a master in commerce.

Then one day in 1863, when he had satisfied himself that the fortunes of war were definitely turning and that in the end the Union cause was destined to triumph, he made a change.

He resigned his clerkship. He recalled his money from Canada and considerably increased at least its nominal amount by converting the gold into greatly depreciated greenbacks.

With this capital he opened a commission and forwarding house at Cairo, together with a coal yard, a bank, five wharf boats, half a dozen tugs, an insurance office, a flour mill and other things. He sent for his brothers to act as his clerks and presently to become his partners.

From the beginning he made money rapidly, and from the beginning he was eagerly on the lookout for opportunities which in that time of rapid change were abundant. He quickly secured control of nearly all the commission and forwarding business that centered at Cairo. By underbidding the government itself he presently had

contracts for all the vast government business of that character.

He was always ready to take up a collateral enterprise that promised results. When the Mississippi river was reopened to commerce by the fall of Vicksburg and Port Hudson, Captain Will Hallam was the first to see and seize the opportunity. He bought everything he could lay his hands on in the way of steamboats and barges and sent them all upon trading voyages—each under charge of a captain, but each directed by his own masterful mind—up and down the Mississippi, and up and down the Ohio, and up and down every navigable tributary of those great rivers.

It was Captain Will Hallam's practice to make partners of all men who might render him service. Thus when he saw how great a business there must be at Cairo in supplying Pittsburg steam coal to the government fleets on the Mississippi and to the thousands of other steamboats trafficking in those waters he went at once to Pittsburg, and two days later he had made a certain Captain Red his partner in the control of that vastly rich trade.

Captain Red was the largest owner of the Pittsburg mines and the pioneer in the business of carrying coal laden barges in acres and scores of acres down the river, pulling them with stern wheel steamers of large power, but still of a power insufficient for the accomplishment of the best results.

Captain Red's fleet was unable to control the trade, Captain Hallam pointed out to him the desirability of making it adequate and dominant. Within two days the two had formed a partnership which included a number of New York bankers and investors as unknown and silent stockholders in the enterprise, and an abundant capital was provided. An order was given for the hurried building of the Ajax, the Hector, the Agamemnon, the Hercules and half a dozen other stern wheel steamers of power so great that they could carry the coal needed for their own furnaces, but must tow it in barges alongside.

These powerful steamers were to push vast fleets of coal laden barges down the river all the way from Pittsburg on the east to St. Louis on the west and New Orleans on the south. They were to supply, through Hallam's agents, every town along the river and every steamboat that trafficked to any part of it. Hallam was master of it all. Cairo was to be the central distributing point, and if anybody along the river owned a coal mine in Kentucky or Indiana or elsewhere he was quickly made to understand that his best means of marketing his product at a profit was to sell it through the Hallam yards at Cairo.

In the meanwhile, as one region after another in the south was conquered by the Union arms, Captain Hallam, whose long river service had brought him into acquaintance with pretty nearly everybody worth knowing south of Cairo, established agents of his own at every point where there was cotton to be bought at extravagant prices, payable in gold, even while the war was going on. These agents bought the cotton, the planters agreeing to deliver it upon the banks of the rivers and leave it there at Hallam's risk. Then Captain Hallam's steamboats, big and little, would push their way up the little rivers, take the cotton on board and carry it to Cairo.

Captain Will Hallam was quick to make up his mind with regard to a man. He was exceedingly accurate in his human judgments, too, and his confidence in them had been strengthened by experience in successfully acting upon them. As he phrased it, he "knew how to size a man up," and as the employer of multitudes of men in all parts of the country and in all sorts of capacities he had daily need of the skill he had acquired in that art. It was as much a part of his equipment for the conduct of his vast and varied enterprise as was his money capital itself.

When young Duncan presented himself in the private office after his night's vigil as a watchman Captain Hallam asked him to sit. Captain Hallam had been impressed by this newcomer, and he wanted to talk with him.

He broke at once into a catechism.

"Why did you do that little fire extinguishing act last night?"

He asked the question precisely as he might have done if he had resented the saving of his wealth of cotton.

"Oh, it was simple enough. The fire meant damage, and I was there. So, of course, I put it out."

"But why? The cotton wasn't yours, and you hadn't been hired to watch it."

"No, of course not. But when a gentleman— I mean when any decent man sees property afire he doesn't ask whose it is before putting out the blaze."

"You're a Virginian, I should say, from your voice—late of the rebel army. What's your rank?"

"None now. I've put the war completely behind me. I'm beginning life anew."

"Good! I wish everybody, north and south, would do the same. But fools won't, and men are mostly fools, you know. When did you get to Cairo?"

"About five minutes before you saw me putting out the fire. I came down the river on the big towboat."

"Where's your baggage?"

"On my back. I have no other clothes. I'll buy some when I earn some money."

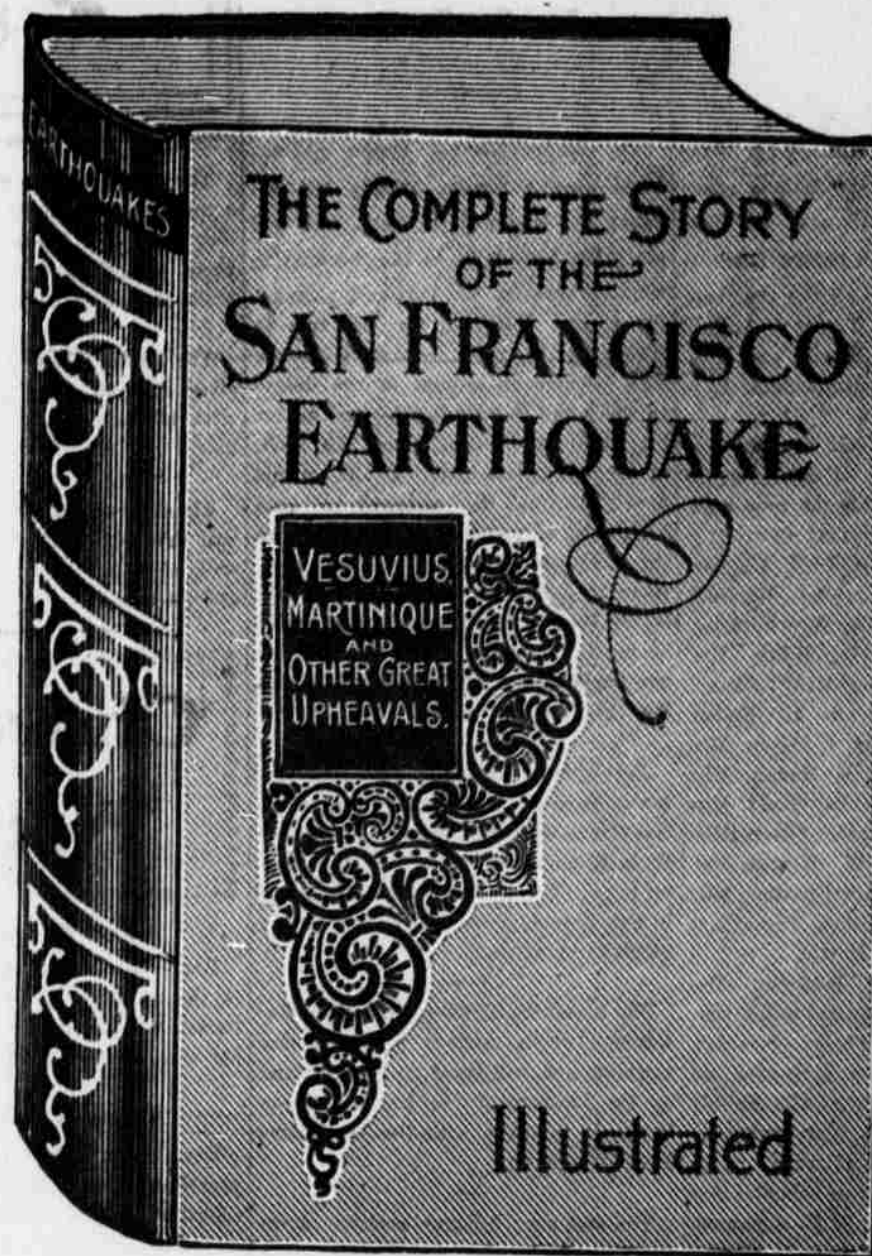
"Where have you been since the surrender?"

"Making my way west."

"How?"

(Continued on page 6)

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